

Only a Few Years Ago El Paso Was a Frontier Town; Today a City Of Progress and Modernity

Recollections Of the City When It Was a Village, When the Law Of the Land Was the Rule Of the Strongest; Old Landmarks, Famous In History, Give Way To Skyscrapers.

Many Famous Houses That Served El Paso In Early Days; Places Wherein History Was Made In the Little Village Of Mudhuts That Was Destined To Become Metropolis Of the Great Southwest Region

(BY L. H. DAVIS.)

MARVELOUS are the changes that have taken place in the old landmarks in the business and residence portions of El Paso that were here during the first decade dating from June, 1881, when the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads reached El Paso. On the first of May, that year, the Southern Pacific was completed to the west bank of the Rio Grande opposite the southwestern cement plant and the piles were being driven for the railroad bridge.

Into El Paso By Steam.

Passengers from the west and north were then transferred to this side on a ferry and thence to the town on mules.

On the stage road down, the visitor passed by the old Fort Bliss officers' quarters and soldiers' barracks and the old Hart homestead and mill, and thence ascended the hill where the new viaduct is at present, called Mundy Heights and Sunset Heights, formerly called Satterthwaite's addition, these only barren rocks and a grass-covered mesa, void of any houses.

From that eminence the visitor first beheld the beautiful, green valley of the Rio Grande and the white old church and buildings of the ancient city of Paso del Norte; and then, below him, he saw the little hamlet of El Paso, an adobe settlement of a few hundred inhabitants. Under the early morning sunlight the panoramic view was beautiful, and to the optimistic visions of a future metropolis seemed to spread out below him. Two great armies of laborers were working on the grades of the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe railroads, apparently in a race to reach the goal of El Paso first.

Old San Francisco Street.

The stage descending the hills entered San Francisco street, then the principal business thoroughfare at a point in front of the present chamber of commerce building, then the extreme western limit of the town. The first buildings met on the south side were the residence of W. W. Mills, between Leon and Chihuahua streets, where the chamber of commerce and Reckhart's old assay office stand, and on the left or north side was the old adobe house of the late house where the new Reckhart building and the Lesinsky building now are. Across the street from the latter is the old Horrocks adobe house, now "Charlie's place," the Tivoli of Charles Heiseveger, and south of it, later, on the southwest corner of San Francisco and Santa Fe streets was the adobe house and law office of J. F. Hague and W. M. Colwell.

Across and on the southeast corner were the adobe houses occupied by the First National bank (J. W. Zouls manager), now occupied by Longwell's transfer and staples. From there to the corner of El Paso street was a long adobe structure covering the present Samuels Schurz building, owned by the Joseph Schurz building, now owned by W. G. Wals Co.

The first business house met on the north side of San Francisco street was that of Ketchum & Degetau, in a neat one story adobe structure covering the present Samuels Schurz building. The manager of Ketchum & Degetau at that time was Adolph Krakauer, the head salesman was George Sauer and Max Weber was head clerk.

Next east of this was the one story adobe house occupied by the federal telegraph and postoffice, on the site of the new two story stone building of Krakauer, Zerk & More. Next east was the long one story building; the western half, where the Hoyt Furniture Co. building now is, then being occupied by the dry goods store of Solomon & Adolph Schutz; and the eastern half, clear to the corner, being occupied by the big store of Isaac Ochs.

Where El Paso Began.

On the latter site is the El Paso Herald building, constructed by Ben Schuster and Leon Blum in the early '80s and occupied first by Schuster Bros., then by Stuart & McKim's and then Charles Black's grocery store and the Center Block hotel.

Around the corner to the north was the old "Central hotel," a one-story adobe house of which John Dougher was the host. Here Ben Moore had his gambling rooms in 1881-2. The hotel was on the western half of the present site of the new seven story White House building adjoining the Herald building on the east. A second story was placed on it the same year, made of adobe, which the flood of July, 1911 demolished, and another (wooden) second story was built in its place. This, the oldest hotel in El Paso, was destroyed by fire in the late '90s and replaced by the old Plaza building of August Andreas. The Plaza building had first one story, then two. Then was torn down to make way for the new White House.

Next east of this was a low adobe building, the original ranch house of Ponce de Leon, built in 1827, on the present site of the Mills building. The de Ponce ranch house in 1882 was used for offices, such as Frank McKim's office of A. R. Lendner and G. N. Marshall. Col. Angus, contractor and architect, John Julian, local agent of Wells Fargo and W. B. Hooper's wholesale liquor store, a beer saloon and a restaurant. In front of this house were adobe porches.

The Famous "Grand Central" Hotel.

On the site of this in 1884-5 J. F. Crosby and Anson Mills having purchased the ground, erected the New Grand Central hotel, a three story brick building. John Dougher rented it and ran the hotel until his death. Tom Westbrook, the old pioneer, was lately manager of the Oriental hotel of Dallas, and finally Sam Eckler, who ran it till it burned down (literally) from the top down to the basement, about the year 1881. In 1882, part of the site was covered with a one story brick building, which was occupied by The Herald and the water company office. Later a second story was built and the whole site covered with the well known Mills building, in which The El Paso Herald has its offices, until its removal into its own building near by.

This is the most interesting spot in El Paso—"Pioneer Plaza."

station in the bronze tablet placed in the main entrance of the new Mills building by Gen. Anson Mills: "On this spot, then near the river, opposite the ancient city of Paso del Norte, Juan Maria Ponce de Leon, the first settler on this side, built his house in 1827."

On The Sheldon Site.

Diagonally southeast and across the street, on the site of the hotel Sheldon, was in 1881 a large adobe building, one story high, covering the entire block, the present hotel site.

On the northwest corner of this site, where the Texas & Pacific passenger office now is, Kohlberg Bros. owned their first cigar store in the old adobe structure in 1881, and some time after Joe Beach opened a restaurant in the rooms next south where the entrance to the Sheldon from the Pioneer Plaza is. On the north side where the front entrance of the hotel is, on Mills street, Sam Hing had his Chinese store, and later on Lendner had his assay office adjoining.

When the new Sheldon building was erected in 1882, for an office building, the Rio Grande pharmacy of Robert Campbell and the Smelter offices were among the first tenants. Kelly & Pollard were the successors of Campbell and occupied the old Kohlberg store until they moved to their present site in the same building.

Back of the old Sheldon site, where the Connetton-Lane building is, was an old adobe house in 1881 which was occupied by Chinamen, and underneath the ground was like the hecatombs, a labyrinth of opium dens. It was a regular tarheel for the feds.

Back of the present Mills building, on the site of the St. Regis hotel, were some one story buildings, in which that summer Col. Marr and Col. Bennett had their El Paso transfer and livery stables, and afterwards succeeded by Detweiler Bros. The St. Regis hotel was built about 1890 on these premises.

Around San Jacinto Plaza.

East of the present Sheldon hotel, on the site of the federal custom house and postoffice, (erected in 1887), was a one story house in 1881, and still east another in which, in the fall of 1881, was the postoffice under Mrs. J. D. Porter, the first postmaster. A second story was later added to it.

Next east, extending to the corner of the present Mesa avenue, was the home and office of Rev. James Wilkins Tays, Episcopal missionary and founder of St. Clement's Episcopal church and corner of Tays addition. The sites of these two last mentioned buildings are now covered by the Roberts-Banner building.

Back of and in front was then treeless and a barren waste. Fronting it on the north side was a low rambling adobe, the first and only building on the north side of the Southern Pacific railroad track; that entire part of town being nothing but a gravel expanse covered with grass and mesquite bushes, and abounding in quails and rabbits clear up to Mount Franklin.

The only road through it was along the line of the present North Oregon street leading up to the old graveyard, around where Carnegie's Cleveland squares and the present hotel are. This cemetery only intensified the solitude of that locality.

On the southeast corner of St. Louis (Mills) and Utah (Mesa Ave.) streets, was the old adobe residence of John Woods (colored) an ex-deputy sheriff of the county, which still stands, though its fronts have been remodeled. This was at one time the U. S. custom house, under W. W. Mills' administration.

Stanton and Texas Streets.

On the next block east of this, at the southeast corner of Mills and Stanton streets, the present site of the Bassett building or Lake house, was G. T. Bassett's lumber yards, established in 1881, a photographic view of which, taken at the time appears in this edition.

On the same block, on the southwest corner of Kansas and Mills streets, was the old adobe homestead of Judge Josiah F. Crosby, and in this, in 1885, was born William Crosby, the first child of anglo-saxon parentage born in El Paso. This was in 1881 the extreme eastern limit of any structures on the line of the present Mills street until the building of the Southern Pacific freight depot, shops and round-house in the summer of 1881.

All east of there between the railroad and Myrtle street was a low bottom, once the river bed, and in the fall of that year it was inundated by the torrential floods and remained a lake covered with ducks for nearly a year afterwards. A picture in this edition shows the waste stretching off to the east.

Mills Street.

In 1881 about the time of the construction of the Southern Pacific passenger depot Mrs. Rodina Stely came to town and started the old Pacific hotel in tents, which she afterward replaced with the large two story buildings on the west side of north Stanton and the north side of Mills streets, which are now called the Commercial hotel property; she soon after built a lot of houses on Texas street, east of Campbell street, for tenement houses.

In the fall of 1882, Judge Pierson built the old three story Pierson hotel on the northwest corner of Kansas and Mills streets, afterward destroyed by fire and replaced by the present Pierson hotel, and still owned by the heirs of Mr. Pierson. In 1885 Francis Parker, the photographer, succeeded by Joe J. R. Stein, Ed Hawley and John Freudenlohn built the old Vendome hotel, which is now enlarged and called the hotel Orndorff, owned by the Orndorff Hotel company and managed by Chas. DeGroot, a large stockholder in the company.

As already stated there was in June 1881 only one building on the north side of the Southern Pacific track, and that was the old adobe one story building with porches or arches in front facing on the north side of San Jacinto plaza. This was called the Arcade. It was a saloon and restaurant. It belonged at one time to Mr. Rhoman, and is on the present site of the Angelus hotel and Crawford theater.

Mesa Avenue.

Originally the present Mesa avenue was called north Utah street, and Broadway, below San Antonio street, was called south Utah street. The subsequent unsavory name of the latter caused the aristocratic dwellers of the north side to change the name of their part of the street to Mesa avenue. During the first ten or fifteen years

that portion of Mesa avenue between Mills and San Antonio streets was a quiet street. Back and south of the old Tays home was an adobe occupied in the early eighties by the carpenter shop and planing mill of Buchanan & Powers, and later by O'Rourke's blacksmith shop, about where Kress's store and the Morgan building are.

South of this, extending to the northwest corner of Texas and Mesa avenue was an old adobe, one story building covering the present site of the Buckler building, owned in those days by G. N. Marshall, and later occupied by E. R. Welch's furniture store. Across the street east from Buchanan & Powers' was the old St. Clement's Episcopal church, erected in the winter of 1882, on the present site of National market. South of the church was a double brick cottage erected in 1882 and occupied as a residence by Mrs. Catharine Davis and her son, L. H. Davis, on the present site of the Stevens building occupied by the R. C. Lightbody Co. and others.

South and across Texas street was a vacant lot, on the present site of the Van Blarcom building and south of this on the northeast corner of San Antonio and Mesa was the old adobe lodge room of the Masonic fraternity, on which is the present Masonic Temple building, erected in 1892. On the northeast part of the same block was the M. E. church, South, erected in 1885 to the west of which was the residence of R. M. McKie, then owner of the El Paso Herald, erected in 1882. To the south of the church was the residence of Mrs. J. D. Porter, erected in 1882. These were on the present site of the Austin-Marr building.

East of this point there were no buildings except the adobe house of J. C. Voss on Texas street on the locality now occupied by the El Paso theater. In those days there were no business houses nor stores on Mesa avenue, Texas nor Stanton streets.

Residence Boom on North Side.

The first habitation built north of the Southern Pacific track, was built by Alex Tays in July 1881 on the southeast corner of Stanton and Wyoming streets. It was a double roomed, one story adobe house covered with an iron roof. Tays had a lot of goats and was the first to sell milk. The original El Paso dairy man. His little daughter used to deliver it to pioneer families. This historic old house still stands, a mute witness to the marvelous improvements since made around it.

The second residence built in that section was that of E. Krause, the architect, who built it in the fall of 1881 and still resides in it. It was considered a palatial residence in those days and is still a fine building. Mr. Krause, by the way is president of the Pioneer association. He paid \$50 apiece for the three lots, which at that time was considered a high price. Indeed a little farther out where the Hotel Dieu now is, land could be bought for \$100 an acre where now 25 foot lots are valued at several thousand dollars each.

North West Avenue.

In 1882-3 a big residential building boom started in the district north of

the S. P. track, running north along the main arteries of Mesa avenue, north Stanton and north Oregon streets and overflowing laterally east and west along Missouri and other cross streets. This boom started in the winter of 1882 by the erection of the fine two story frame residence of Robert F. Campbell on the northwest corner of Mesa avenue and Wyoming street. It was considered then the finest residence in the southwest, and is still occupied by Mrs. Campbell and family.

Following this land scores of residences arose along Mesa avenue for the next two or three years; and while some envious residents of the south side called that section "Pietry hill," the Mesa people prided themselves as living on the "Fifth avenue of El Paso." Among these new residences were those of Frank E. Hunter, Zeno B. Clardy, A. G. Foster, W. N. Small, J. C. Lackland, J. E. Townsend, John Lane, S. O. Lessor, John Julian, Joseph Gier, M. Alma and others, nearly all of which remain still occupied by the original builders.

Soon after this H. R. Hillebrand and Millard Patterson erected their residences on Missouri street and the buildings arose rapidly up and down that thoroughfare.

Hillebrand's house is at the corner of Missouri and Stanton, and was largely the home of the Mexican consulate. This residence was long considered the finest structure on the north side.

Satterthwaite's Addition.

The most remarkable residential building boom on the north side, and indeed in all El Paso, in the early days was that inaugurated by Col. J. Fisher Satterthwaite, a recent arrival from New York, corner of the old Satterthwaite addition, covering all the country north of the S. P. track and west of Mesa avenue, including all of the present Sunset Heights addition.

In the fall of 1881 this modern Romulus and town builder suddenly appeared on the scene with an army of

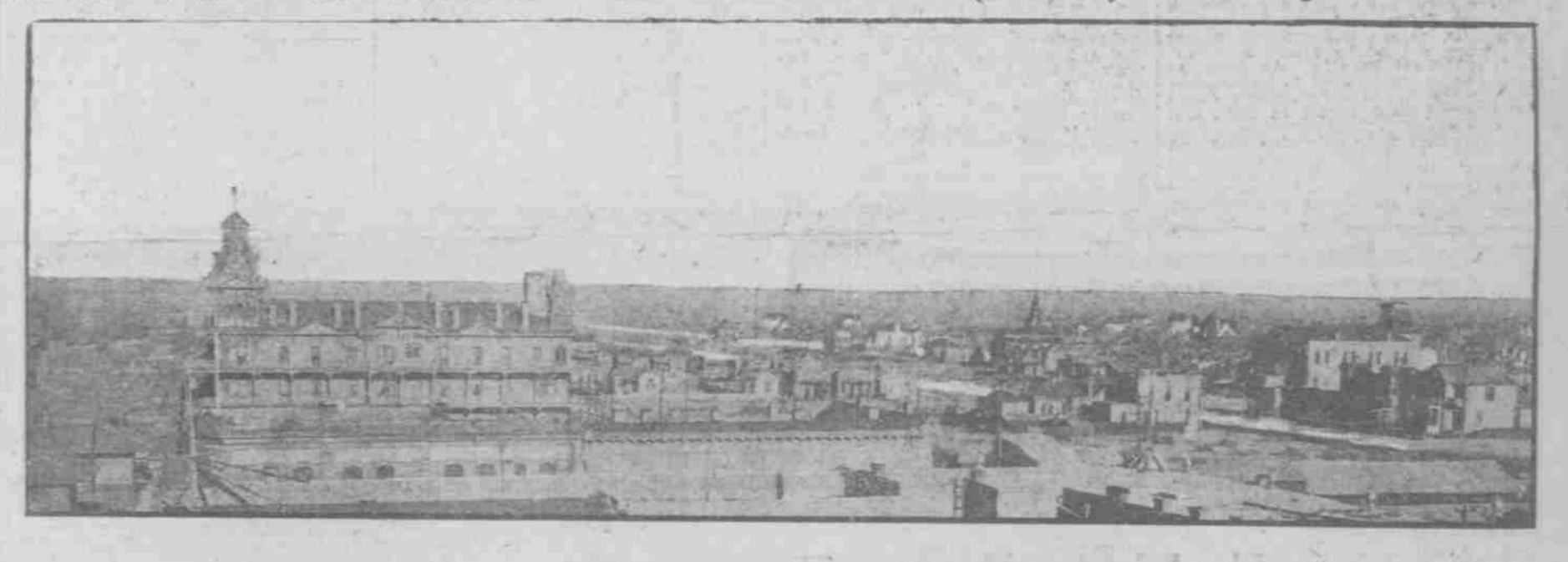
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El Paso In 1884. Looking East From Main Plaza



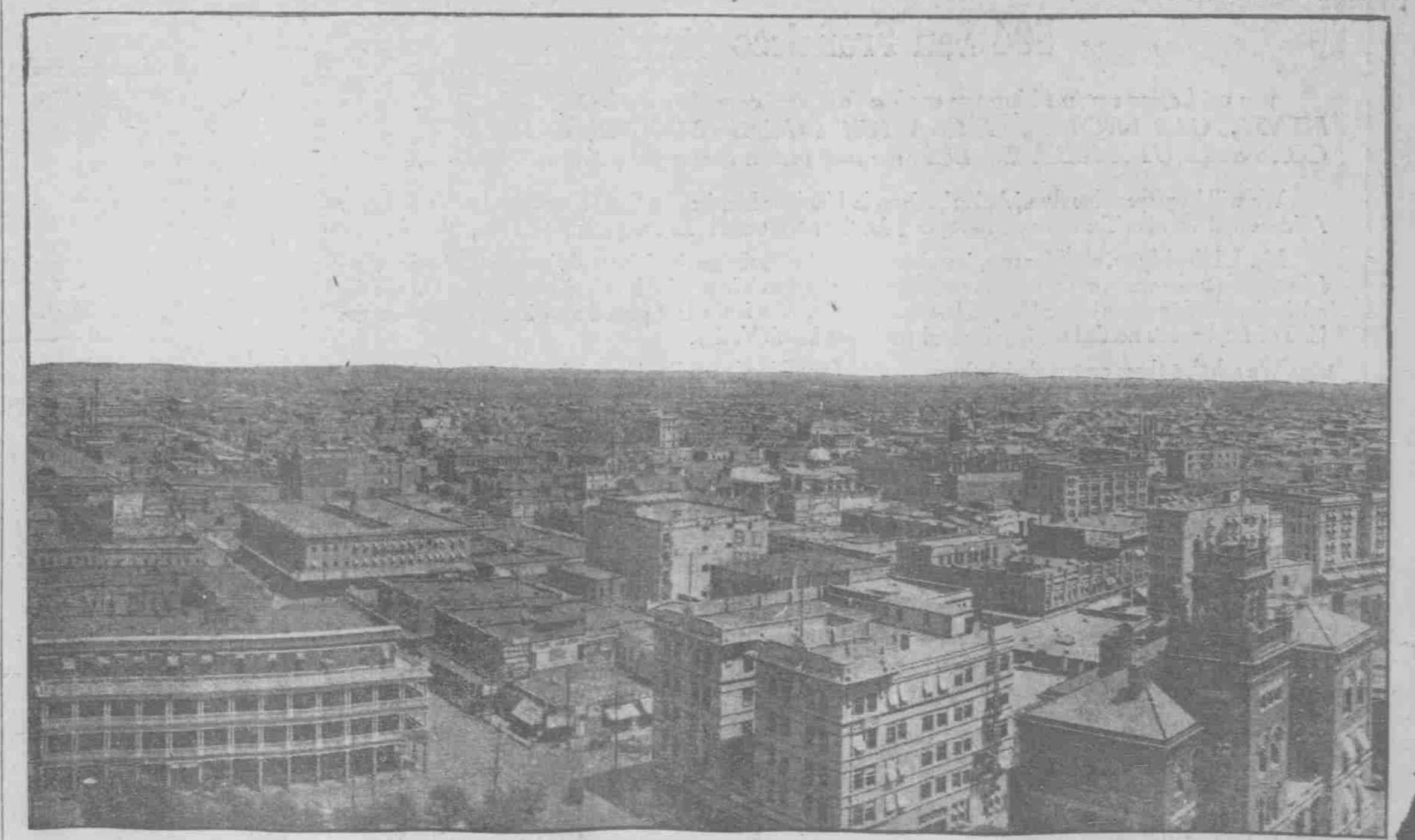
The white building a little to the right of center background is judge Jos. Magoffin's house, the oldest American residence in El Paso. At the extreme left is shown Maj. Rand's house. The lumber yards occupy in this picture exactly the site of the large three story hotel, to left of center in the lower picture.

Same View As Above, Ten Years Later (1894) Looking Southeast



The Pierson hotel in left foreground burned about 10 years ago. The old Central school, now the Elks' club, is seen on right, and the First Methodist church. The two streets shown are (nearest in) Texas street, and (a little further out) Myrtle street. The last house shown on Myrtle is the house now close in town, occupied at one time by James Magoffin. The large house in the center of the picture on Myrtle is the old Cokes-Stewart house.

Same View As Above Two Pictures, But Taken At the Present Time



This is looking southeast from the Mills building. The Elks' club (old Central school) is the dark building about two inches to the left of the center. Among the buildings shown in the picture are the Toltec club, Calisher building, Bassett building, city hall, courthouse, Roberts-Banner building, electric building, Two Republics Life building, Caples building, federal building and hotel Orndorff. The transformation shown in the contrast between the top picture and this view has been accomplished in less than 30 years. The land in the foreground of this picture is worth today \$20 to \$25 per square foot, or \$850,000 to \$1,000,000 per acre.